

592 [64] Every woman is thus the potential founder
 571 of a property-group, and often, after her brothers have in turn been karanavans and are dead, she lives to see her segment's property divided from that of her sisters, and her son or even daughter's son established as head of her group. However, some women do not of course become founders of groups, either because they have no children or because they have only daughters who themselves become founders in their own right when their sons are old enough. Again, a group of brothers with no sisters was traditionally unlikely to form a separate group, since they would have no women to perpetuate their group (or for that matter, to cook for them). They would be likely to remain voluntarily attached to a parallel segment, succeeding, along with their classificatory brothers, to karanavanship as they became in turn oldest member of the group. Alternatively they might split away and adopt one or more girls from collateral segments to perpetuate their separate group.

In all cases of partition, division of the property was stirpital: equal shares accrued to segments of the same order which were descended from sisters. The segment which contained the old karanavan at the time of partition usually retained the ancestral house.

592(d) Kinship Relations within the Group

602 The karanavan was traditionally unequivocal
 868 head of the group. He managed the property, built new houses, repaired the old, leased land from the janmi, and controlled [65] the labour

592 of serfs. He could command all other members,
 602 male or female, and children were trained to
 868 obey him with reverence. He² had the rights of
 a pater over small children: till puberty he was
 responsible for having them educated in Malaya-
 lam reading and writing, must discipline them
 like a father in patriline, and might beat them
 if they disobeyed. Even today in orthodox
 [593] houses, the father of a child has no share at all
 in the karanavan's rights of pater: he may not
 interfere in education or discipline or question
 the karanavan's right to dispose of a child's
 career and services.

As their legal guardian, the karanavan must
 traditionally pass on to young men the martial
 traditions, swords and other weapons of the
 taravad. He must educate them also in the man-
 agement of lands and serfs and the cultivation
 of gardens. Even today in villages, every Na-
 yar has expert knowledge of paddy and garden
 cultivation and the planning of household archi-
 tecture. Such information is learned with great
 care from the karanavan and younger brothers
 of the mother, all of whom play a part in the
 child's education after the age of four to five.
 In spite of interpersonal rivalry between men,
 Nayars show great loyalty to the group as a
 whole, pride in the military skill, dignity and
 financial integrity of their karanavans of past
 ages, and eagerness to identify with their moth-
 ers' brothers and eventually take their place as
 leaders of the property-group. This pride in
 the offices and public status of the group is of
 course most marked in royal lineages, [66] but

1/7 [the Karanavan --- Analyst]

592 it occurs in subcastes as low as washermen,
602 funeral priests and barbers, among whom all
868 tasks are traditionally learnt from the mother's
brothers. The handing on of skills in the matri-
592 lineal line goes along with the traditional belief
602 that men of a taravad resemble each other in
828 character, as indeed they often do. Some groups
are characterized as bold, and fearless in fight-
ing; others as cautious with money; others as
good arbitrators in disputes, friendly to all men;
[87] others as unusually intelligent. Individuals are
also expected to resemble their fathers (as well
as their mothers) physiologically, for the Naya-
ars are not ignorant of the male role in pro-
creation; but character, which they prize great-
ly, is rightly thought to be transmitted from
men to their sisters' sons.

592 It seems probable that the karanavan's powers
602 were limited by the codification of law which
671 came about during British rule. It is not certain
whether he could traditionally alienate land
without the consent of other adults of the group.
During British rule he could not. British law
also permitted appeal to the court by junior
members for the removal of a karanavan who
could be shown guilty of gross mismanagement.
He could then be set aside on a pension in favour
of the next younger man. An inefficient karana-
van could moreover be forced by court order to
maintain accounts of his income and expenditure;
since 1933 in Malabar District and 1938 in Cochin
all karanavans are legally obliged to do this and
to make available their accounts for inspection
by junior members [67] once a year. However,

Nayar: Central Kerala

337

individual basis, but this money seems only to have sufficed for their food and other necessities while on the march or on service in towns. When they were at home in their villages their karanavan assumed responsibility for each man's customary gifts to his wives in other households. 613 592 [465] [431]

Within his own household the karanavan personally allocated their subsistence to its members. Every few weeks he transferred quantities of unhusked rice, vegetables, and other stores from the granary to storerooms inside the house. They were then usually taken over by the eldest woman, who kept keys to the storerooms and chests and allocated daily supplies to the kitchen. In property groups with more than one homestead the karanavan delivered quantities of paddy, salt, and coconut oil twice annually to each house according to the number of its members. Each house sent a person daily to the ancestral house to bring fresh vegetables, milk, buttermilk, and other perishable foods. In all taravads the karanavan controlled purchases from the town. Twice a year—at New Year and at the harvest festival—he distributed clothing to both male and female members. 613 592 511

Virtuous karanavans were those who managed the daily affairs of the taravad with thrift, justice, and meticulous care, but who, through judicious planning, were able to lavish grand feasts upon caste members, tenants, village servants, and serfs at the major life-crisis rites. An aged karanavan would enumerate with satisfaction the various feasts at funerals, tali rites, and first-menstruation ceremonies which he had satisfactorily conducted. Each of the servant castes contributed appropriate goods or services in advance of these feasts, and each Nayar house reciprocated the hospitality when its own life-crisis rites came round. Besides reaffirming in a ceremonial manner the different types of ties between Nayars and between Nayars and the lower castes, the life-crisis ceremonies seem to have stimulated production and provided suitable foci for acts of economic redistribution and reciprocity. 613 592 574

The amounts of time spent by junior men of the taravad on different activities are no longer clearly known. We know however that at the age of seven a boy was inducted into military training in the village gymnasium; this training persists in a few villages, and includes fencing, wrestling, rigorous exercise, and very strenuous massage. Traditionally, Nayars also learned archery from a special caste of village servants (Vil Kurups). For a part of their time they attended a village school run by yet another caste of schoolteachers (Eruttachans); almost all adult Nayar men and most women were literate. 613 868 [002] [564] [875] [872] [212]

613 in Malayalam and some became famous poets during the sixteenth
● 868 and later centuries. A Nayar received his arms from his feudal lord
[212]—a village headman, a district chief, or a prince—at the age of six-
[702] teen. From this time until, perhaps, late middle age, he seems to have
[726] spent periods of each year away from his village attending military
exercises in the larger towns or fighting in the continual wars against
the North Malabar chiefdoms, Walluvanad, or Palghat, or between
Cochin and Calicut themselves. Evidently Nayars also spent long pe-
riods in their villages, at least in the monsoon seasons, for they policed
the villages, arranged village festivals, were bailiffs on the landlord's
domain, and paid regular visits to local wives. Nayar youths were also
obliged to attend with their seniors and fulfill ceremonial obligations
[782] at the life-crisis rites of the landlord family. The rites were of course
[439] conducted in a grand manner and served as a focus for the collec-
tion and redistribution of perishable goods throughout the village.

613 Nayar youths also did some cultivation of vegetables and spices in
868 the gardens of their taravāds. Every youth received a rigorous train-
241 ing in cultivation methods, land management, the keeping of accounts,
and the construction of houses, either directly from his kārānavan or,
more usually, from the brothers of his own mother. However, there
was no clear-cut allocation of differential authority and economic roles
among the junior men of a taravād in this area. This was evidently
not necessary because the bulk of the work was done by tenants and
serfs, whose management could be most easily controlled by a single
experienced man. It was enough that a young Nayar should learn how
to manage and to cultivate so that he might one day replace his kārāna-
van. Their military duties were obviously the important ones for junior
Nayars. It is unfortunate that we know next to nothing about how they
[701] were organized in the army, or even if they fought in lineage groups
under the leadership of their mothers' brothers. All we know is that they
were for the most part recruited in lineages, with the members of one
lineage serving the same feudal lord.

613 The division of labor between the sexes was less rigid than in most
462 Hindu castes, but was well demarcated in daily life. Girls played with
boys, attended the village school, and even received training in the
[588] gymnasium, until they underwent the tāli rite, usually at about the age
of eleven. After this they were segregated from the men of their lin-
age and concentrated their time on domestic tasks. For most pur-
poses the group of matrilineally related women formed a single work
unit under the informal authority of the oldest (or oldest competent)
woman. She gave out produce for cooking and allotted to each woman

WOMAN-DAUGHTER

593 A woman was her daughter's immediate mentor and moral authority throughout her life. Whereas a son entered the company of men and boys after about the age of seven, a daughter returned to her mother's intimate care after the tāli rite. From her mother and from older women of the taravād a girl learned cookery, household and child care, manners, morals, and minor agricultural work. As her daughters came of age a woman took personal pride in their dress, jewelry, and physical attractions. It is said that formerly mothers and other matrilineally related women instructed girls in the arts of love. A woman should spend her life in her mother's household, and she should obey her, taking over from her more and more of the household responsibilities. She should defend her mother in disputes with other women, offer her companionship in old age, and perform funeral and anniversary rites for her soul after her death.

[868] [864] [769] A daughter replaced her mother in the social structure and was expected to resemble her in character, as indeed she often did. A woman's constant care for her daughter's welfare became particularly prominent during the latter's pregnancy and parturition, when the mother must be at hand to offer counsel, good food, and medicines. So long as they respected her and did not encroach on her authority, she should welcome her daughters' husbands with cordiality. If, however, a husband's conduct gravely displeased his mother-in-law, she had the right to ask her daughter to reject him. A dutiful daughter would usually do so; if she refused, the mother might place her case before the karanavan and request that the husband be dismissed.

[606] [586] Behavior between mother and daughter was usually informal, and they had few secrets from one another. In the privacy of their home and in the absence of men, matrilineally related women of today discuss their affairs and their neighbors freely, sometimes with hilarious mimicry. Mother and daughter were expected to have occasional quarrels. Indeed, there was often a deep undercurrent of rivalry between them which might break out into acrimonious mutual scolding. A daughter should bear patiently her mother's reprimands, but even though she struck her mother in anger her bad conduct would be forgiven more readily than the neglect of a son. A mother would also often try to shield her daughters from anger on the part of the karanavan, of the mother's own brothers, or even of her sons. Mother and daughters usually maintained unity in disputes with other segments of the taravād, and it was axiomatic that mother and daughters stand united in disputes with other households.

593 will have had different life experiences. One set of siblings may re-
184 ceive property from their father in which their maternal half-siblings
858 have no legal rights. Each set of full siblings will have important
[613] relationships with its own paternal kin. In many respects, therefore,
children of the same mother by different fathers have a relationship
more comparable to that of the children of two sisters than to that
which obtains between full siblings. However, the ties between
maternal half-siblings are much stronger than those between paternal
half-siblings, who have only a slight relationship. At best, it may be
comparable to that between paternal parallel cousins; at worst it may
be one of open hostility.

768 A woman's claims on her husband's taravād ceased absolutely with
613 his death. As in Central Kerala, a widow was ceremonially conducted
out of her husband's house immediately after the death and could
[764] not enter it thereafter. Husband and wife did not observe death pollu-
[783] tion and did not take part in each other's funeral rites.

591 Hypergamous marriages in aristocratic lineages bore some re-
613 semblance to those in Central Kerala, although they were never
184 polyandrous. Brahman husbands of royal or chiefly women lived
matrilocally at the expense of the palace as in Central Kerala. Royal
and chiefly men, however, brought their lower-ranking wives to live
on their estates in avunculocal residence. The wife and her children
occupied a separate house or else a wing of the palace with separate
[783] cooking arrangements. Husband and wife observed rules of ritual
pollution as in hypergamous marriages in the Central kingdoms.

855 THE FATHER AND HIS KIN

613 The kārānavan held ultimate legal control over all his juniors, but
593 their fathers had limited customary rights in and obligations to them.
A man was expected to care for his children in his home until they
reached puberty or married. Although their own taravād had a legal
obligation to maintain them in food and clothing, the father's taravād
[867] customarily supplied their day-to-day needs as a matter of pride. The
[868] father was expected to train his small children in manners and morals,
to see that they were taught to write, and to give his sons instruction
in cultivation. In return he could ask his children to do small tasks,
593 could exercise domestic discipline while they stayed with him, and
613 could expect kindness and occasional help from them when he was
[584] old. His consent had to be sought for his children's marriages and he
[431] often arranged the marriage of his daughter, although he could not
override her kārānavan's wishes. Over and above their customary

174 not borne out either by any Sanskrit authority or Dravidian traditions; ¹ but certain legends refer to conflicts between them and the Hindu colonists of later times, and these are said to have been led by Parasurama, and the Nagas from Pātāla whom they found in possession of the country. ² The latter were not forced to divide the spoil with the Kshatriyas or warriors who elsewhere counterbalanced the power of the Brahmans, and obliged them to keep up a continual struggle in which victory alternated with defeat. These internecine dissensions gave the indigenous element a chance to recover itself by degrees, and finally gave birth to a military aristocracy called the Nayars. ³

701 The Nayars of ancient times formed the chief militia in Cochin, Malabar and Travancore, and their valour and other fighting qualities evoked the admiration of foreigners, and inspired even the restless Portuguese poet Cameons, who described them in the following apt lines:—

The military character of the Nayars.

Poliar the labouring clans were named;
By the proud Nayars the noble rank is claimed;
The toils of culture and of art they scorn:
The shining faulchion brandished in the right;
Their left arm wields the target in the fight.

175 One of the earliest accounts of the Nayars is found in the
701 writings of Duarte Barbosa, who described them as men of noble descent, who had to be armed as knights by the king or lord with whom they lived, and who could not call themselves Nayars until they had been so equipped as to bear arms. They were generally sent to school at the age of seven to learn all manner of athletic feats and to enable them to use their weapons. ⁴ Their sinews and joints were so stretched and anointed with the *oyle sesamus* by skillful fellows called "Panicians," who were captains in war, that they became very light and nimble; and could "wind and twine their bodies" as if they had no bones. They cast themselves backwards and forwards, high and low, to the astonishment of the beholders, and the delight in their weapon was so great that they

1. Grammar of the Dravidian Languages, Introduction, page 107.
2. The Sun and the Serpent, page 107.
3. Primitive Folk, page 107.
4. A description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar by Duarte Barbosa, page 128—129.

853 could see, was obviously a way of circumventing the difficulty of adequate nourishment, something to which a great majority of the mothers in the vast multitudes of Asia habitually resort.

*595
[1868]
[126] Father Korappan was away working, and he had taken twelve year old Krishna with him as an apprentice, so I was not able to photograph the whole family. But I obtained a picture of Sita with Kumaran at her breast and Chami and Narayan sitting next to her, which I give here in Fig. 15. The genealogy is in Table 18.

564
614
[428] Where *tarawads* were not known, Sita gave me the name of the village. From what she told me, the clans were patrilineal, inheritance was *makkathayam*, and exogamy was the rule, also in the *kiriyams*. Her husband's matrilineal descent group was called Walleananad. The house was leased as a *kudiyiruppu* for which they paid a yearly rent of twelve annas to the *janmi*, Eranur Mana Narayan Nambudripad. They had been fifteen years at this place, and had come from about a furlong away where they used to reside before. This awakened my curiosity, and I enquired how this had happened.

Sita told me that her husbands originally lived in the other house, because it was the *tarawad's* headquarters. The name Kundilpadam which it bore meant "low field", and Vellarkaden which was the name of their present house, was just the appellation by which their new dwelling was known. Her husbands' father was the youngest of a pair of brothers, and they had both taken wives to themselves and had not lived in polyandry. Their offspring, her husbands and their father's elder brother's children, had continued to live together, and they, Panju and Korappan, had married first, twenty seven years ago. Then, twelve years later, the cousins had also got married, and, in order to make place for them, Sita and her surviving husband, Korappan, being the junior members, had moved away to another residence, the one where they lived at present.

[601] I made the genealogy of the neighbouring household as the informant gave it to me. It is shown here in Table 19. Two brothers, Panju and Raman, respectively aged forty six and forty, lived polyandrously with a common wife called Cherona, thirty three years old. They had four children, of whom none were married, since they were still too young.

361 On the 21st of November, 1949, I went to Palarmampalam, a cluster of houses on the road between Ottappalam and the Lakkidi railway station, about a mile before the latter is reached. The object of our visit was to see a *Pulluvan* household, that is of herbalists and *nag* snake worshippers, a sub-caste associated to the artisans.

[TEXT CONTINUES ON P. 214]

land-owning class. The large admixture of Aryan blood 173
combined with the physical peculiarities of the country 564
would go far to explain the very marked difference
between the Nayar of the present day and what may be
considered the corresponding Dravidian races in the rest
of the Presidency.*

In connection with the former position of the Nayars 175
as protectors of the State, it is noted by Mr. Logan † that 564
"in Johnston's 'Relations of the most famous Kingdom 701
in the world' (1611), there occurs the following quaintly
written account of this protector guild. 'It is strange to
see how ready the Souldiour of this country is at his
Weapons: they are all gentile men, and tearmed Naires.
At seven Years of Age they are put to School to learn [168]
the Use of their Weapons, where, to make them nimble
and active, their Sinnewes and Joints are stretched by
skilful Fellows, and annointed with the Oyle Sesamus
[gingelly: *Sesamum indicum*]: By this annointing they
become so light and nimble that they will winde and
turn their Bodies as if they had no Bones, casting them
forward, backward, high and low, even to the Astonish-
ment of the Beholders. Their continual Delight is in their [186]
Weapon, perswading themselves that no Nation goeth
beyond them in Skill and Dexterity.' And Jonathan
Duncan, who visited Malabar more than once as one
of the Commissioners from Bengal in 1792-93, and
afterwards as Governor of Bombay, after quoting the
following lines from Mickle's Camoens, Book VII—

'Poliar the labouring lower clans are named:
By the proud Nayrs the noble rank is claimed;
The toils of culture and of art they scorn:
The shining faulchion brandish'd in the right—
Their left arm wields the target in the fight—'

* Gazetteer of the Malabar district. † Manual of the Malabar district.

175 company of Nāyars for the honour of the Valluvanad
643 Rāja. And probably the frantic fanatical rush of the
762 Māppillas on British bayonets, which is not even yet
796 a thing of the past, is the latest development of this
ancient custom of the Nāyars. The martial spirit of
184 the Nāyars in these piping times of peace has quite
died out for want of exercise. The Nāyar is more and
[224] more becoming a family man. Comparatively few of
them now-a-days even engage in hunting." According
175 to an inscription of the King Kulōttunga I (A.D. 1083-
648 84), he conquered Kudamalai-Nadu, *i.e.*, the western hill
181 country (Malabar); whose warriors, the ancestors of the
703 Nāyars of the present day, perished to the last man in
defending their independence.*

175 The following description of the Nāyars at the
564 beginning of the sixteenth century is given by Duarte
701 Barbosa.† "The Nairs are the gentry, and have no
[41] other duty than to carry on war, and they continually
carry their arms with them, which are swords, bows,
arrows, bucklers, and lances. They all live with the
kings, and some of them with other lords, relations of the
kings, and lords of the country, and with the salaried
governors, and with one another. They are very smart
men, and much taken up with their nobility. . . .

175 In general, when they are seven years of age, they are
● 868 immediately sent to school to learn all manner of feats
of agility and gymnastics for the use of their weapons.

* E. Hultzsch, South-Indian Inscriptions, III, 2, 1203.

† Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar. Translation.
Hakluyt Society, 1866.

First they learn to dance and then to tumble, and for that purpose they render supple all their limbs from their childhood, so that they can bend them in any direction. 175 828 ●

These Nairs live outside the towns separate from other people on their estates which are fenced in. When they go anywhere, they shout to the peasants, that they may get out of the way where they have to pass; and the peasants do so, and, if they did not do it, the Nairs might kill them without penalty. And, if a peasant were by misfortune to touch a Nair lady, her relations would immediately kill her, and likewise the man that touched her and all his relations. This, they say, is done to avoid all opportunity of mixing the blood with that of the peasants. These are very clean and well-dressed women, and they hold it in great honour to know how to please men. They have a belief amongst them that the woman who dies a virgin does not go to paradise. 175 564 683 175 564 831

Writing in the eighteenth century, Hamilton states * that "it was an ancient custom for the Samorin (Zamorin) to reign but twelve years, and no longer. If he died before his term was expired, it saved him a troublesome ceremony of cutting his own throat on a public scaffold erected for that purpose. He first made a feast for all his nobility and gentry, who were very numerous. After the feast he saluted his guests, went on the scaffold, and very neatly cut his own throat in the view of the assembly. His body was, a little while after, burned with great pomp and ceremony, and the grandees elected a new Samorin. Whether that custom was a religious or a civil ceremony I know not, but it is now laid aside, and a new custom is followed by the modern Samorin, that a jubilee is 175 643 762 175 643 796

* New Account of the East Indies, 1744.